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REMARKS

OF

RICHARD S. SPOFFORD,
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OF NEWBURYPORT,

AT A MEETING OF THE CITIZENS OF MASSACHUSETTS, CALLED
IN WASHINGTON, D. C., JANUARY 20, 1879, TO TAKE
COMMEMORATIVE NOTICE OF THE DEATH OF
HON. CALEB CUSHING.

A few words will suffice to-night, my friends, to attest my sympathy with you, as citizens of Massachusetts, in contemplation of the mournful event which has assembled us together, and my sense of personal bereavement in the death of a valued friend. On some other occasion, when the grateful task can be accomplished with more of deliberate discrimination than now, when I, at any rate, shall be better prepared to undertake it, it will be my dutiful endeavor to commemorate in some fitting manner the life and character of Mr. Cushing, as known and appreciated by me throughout a period of intimate association covering not less than a quarter of a century. To-night, however, in the full consciousness that this association, with its multiplicity of cherished experiences and incidents, is forever ended, I am conscious of that degree of embarrassed feeling that will permit me to do little more than express my high appreciation of his character and public services, and,

above all, my profound sense of those patriotic aspirations and motives by which he was uniformly governed.

It has been extremely grateful to me, as a friend and fellow-townsman, to observe with what demonstrations of respect, both of an official and unofficial character, the tidings of his decease have been received throughout the country. Nothing in this regard, I am glad to say, has been lacking which could evince the lofty estimate of his public and private character, and the general recognition of his distinguished career. In that highest of our judicial tribunals, the Supreme Court of the United States, the field in bygone years of so many of his forensic triumphs; by the Executive branch of the government, where he has left behind him an enduring record in the great office of Attorney-General, and one not less enduring in the Department of State; by the Legislature of Massachusetts, so many times honored by his presence and made illustrious by his shining efforts; by the surviving veterans of the campaigns of Mexico, mindful of his military fame; by the people of Newburyport, whose attachment to him, descending from father to son, through generations, no vicissitude of time or fortune could alienate, and which he fervently reciprocated; and now here, where we, his fellow-citizens of Massachusetts, sojourners at the Capital, are met together in the performance of this memorial service,—all that the most considerate and partial feeling could prompt has been worthily and graciously bestowed in every form of tributary honor to his memory.

Thus, it may with truth be said, that if the hour of his death is to be considered unfortunate for the country which still has need of those superb attainments and powers which made him second to none among statesmen and publicists, it has not been inopportune for his fame. Nor, could it have been permitted to him, through some clairvoyance of the mind's vision, to have foreseen what has occurred, would he have regretted, I believe, with physical powers

yielding to the approaches of age, the time of his departure. That so illustrious a man should have been thus widely honored, is but a criterion of the country's gratitude for arduous labors in more than one conspicuous sphere of public life, and for services not the less important that, in many instances, they have been rendered without the incitement of contemporary fame or the pride and prestige of official station.

Few, indeed, have brought to the service of the country abilities so distinguished and diversified as Mr. Cushing, and to none can be ascribed a more untiring zeal or a loftier patriotism. So constantly was he absorbed in public affairs from youth to age, so preoccupied always with the toils, the studies, or the responsibilities of statesmanship, that he has appeared to me sometimes to be indifferent to—I should rather have said to be independent of—those solaces and charms of private life which are the customary requirements and support of men. Indeed, for him, childless and wifeless as he was, the sum and ultimate of life were found in the idea and name of country; so that he at least could say, with peculiar emphasis, in the poet's words—

"That dear name
Comprises home, kind kindred, fostering friends,
Protecting laws."

Nor was his devotion in this respect prompted by interested motives or a dishonorable ambition. So far from this, it will surprise many to know that it is only within a brief period that he has been relieved from embarrassment in his private affairs, and that he leaves behind him no large possessions, such as are the ordinary emolument of such labors as he endured. What is still more to his credit, be it said at this time, it concerned him little in what direction the winds of popular favor were blowing, the monitors and masters of his life were his convictions of right and duty, under all circumstances whatsoever.

Of the public men of America, living or departed, there

is not one who, in my judgment, might with greater justification than he have applied to himself and his public conduct through a long and eventful life language such as that imputed to Cicero, whom in many respects he resembled, and which a great cardinal once uttered in the parliament of Paris:

“In difficillimis reipublicæ temporibus urbem nunquam deserui, in prosperis nihil de publico delibavi, in desperatis nihil timui.”

“In the worst time of the Republic, I have never deserted the State; in its prosperity, I have asked nothing for myself; and in its most adverse moments, I never lost hope.”

When, in a later age, some great orator of the Republic—the Pericles of its meridian splendor, or, if that be inevitable, the Demosthenes of its declining period—here in this grandest of Capitals, shall revert to our times and recount their history, few names upon the roll of our civic fame will seem to him and to those whom he addresses more illustrious than his in honor of whom we are now assembled.

The attritions of prejudice or passion, the misconceptions of ignorance, the blindness of jealousy or envy,—these, for the time being, when political passions are dominant, and the rancor of faction malignant as now, may, in some quarters, obscure the fame of one who was ever too thoughtless of its vindication; may seek even to detract from his personal merits and the value of his public labors. But in the future, these, the mere fleeting shadows of the moment, will be swept away, and, gathering a steadfast brilliancy with advancing years, the fame of Caleb Cushing will have a secure place and be proudly cherished in the hearts of his countrymen. Thus will our departed friend and fellow-citizen have achieved all that in human life is most honorable to men, the fitting reward of those unselfish toils which in the high walks of public duty still make ambition

virtue,—that ambition which was for him, and will be for the great in every age.

“The spur that the clear spirit doth raise
 * * * * *
 To scorn delights and live laborious days.”

By all it will then be clearly recognized that the true rank to be assigned to him is that of one among the greatest of statesmen, the most learned of lawyers, the most patriotic of citizens, the most accomplished of men; and that, occupying this pre-eminent position, so great and valuable were his public services, it may truthfully be said that in his day and generation he was one of the pillars of the Republic.





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